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26TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE
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May 11, 2020

Commissioner Charles Rettig
Internal Revenue Service
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 3241
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig,

I am writing to express my concern about the re-opening of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) locations nationwide without formal guidance from the agency to protect the health and safety of returning employees. COVID-19's highly infectious nature demands that the agency institute strict and enforceable safety precautions.

Earlier this month, the Wage & Investment Division began seeking volunteers from Accounts Management employees to return to work in several remote call sites. One of these sites is in Cheektowaga, New York, in my district, which employs over 500 employees. Employees who volunteer are expected to report to their assigned sites today, however the National Treasury Employee Union (NTEU) has relayed employees' concerns about the safety precautions taken by your agency.

Specifically, while volunteers are eligible for a retention incentive, this should not replace the necessity for formal guidance and proactive steps towards protecting employees. The instruction to volunteers of previously opened sites to provide their own face coverings did not instill confidence in the agency's capacity to adequately safeguard employees' health. Although the IRS has confirmed with NTEU that it had obtained quantities of disposable masks for any employee without one, there are still uncertainties surrounding employees' ability to properly distance from one another, their access to adequate supplies of sanitizers and disinfectants, and the cleanliness of facilities and their high traffic areas.

It is also my understanding that the IRS has instituted a self-screening process that puts the onus on employees to self-diagnose and remain home if they are experiencing symptoms. This policy has already failed in a recently re-opened IRS campus location in Kansas City, where an employee returned to work while symptomatic and then subsequently tested positive for COVID-

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19 causing a temporary closure of that facility. If locations are to re-open safely, there must be a more concerted effort to screen employees entering facilities, such as temperature checks.

These returning employees are seeking to ensure that essential services are provided to Americans nationwide during a crisis. It is your responsibility to ensure that they can do this work in a safe environment with minimal risk to their health and their communities at large. I implore you to deploy the necessary resources and issue formal guidance to support a safe reopening of campuses and remote call sites.

Sincerely,



BRIAN HIGGINS
MEMBER OF CONGRESS